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—BY—

WM. PERRY.

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Cast of Characters

Ezra Bartee—A wealthy land-owner and community boss
Jeremiah Sutcliff—A follower of Ezra
Luther Evington—A progressive, up-to-date citizen.
A Youth—Distributing circulars
Thomas Allman—A speaker at Evington's meeting
Matilda Wharton—Neighborhood tattler
Susie Clifton—Getting signatures to a petition
Hennie Goodlake—Little old woman with squeaking voice
Dorothy Rupert—A considerable talker
Effie Brown—Brings startling news
Nicodemus Bartee—Son of Ezra Bartee
Judge—Holding court
Commonwealth Attorney
Policeman
A number of men and women

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The Trials of Ezra

ACT I.

(Group of village gossipers (men) seated on boxes, etc., discussing current events. They are dressed in working style, whittling, etc. The leader, Ezra Bartee, is standing, apparently much excited.)

Ezra—Now, men, what do you think of it? There is Cedrick Norman, without saying a word to ME went and sold his place to some furriner. No telling what sort of blood will be brought into our community.

Jeremiah Sutcliff—*(one of the group)* I was surprised at Cedrick, myself, but I reckon he thought it was none of our business.

Ezra—None of MY business. You remember when we organized our club and Cedrick was one, we agreed that none of us would sell our land outside our bunch.

Jeremiah—Yes, but none of us could pay the price but you, and you own pretty near all the land hereabouts. I expect he thought you had enough.

(Enter Luther Evington, a neatly dressed, middle-aged man.)

Luther—Good afternoon, gentlemen, I presume all of you live around here, and probably you would like to know that I am the purchaser of the Cedrick Norman place. I am glad to be a citizen of Clinton, and my wife and I will be glad to coöperate with you in bringing about any reforms you wish to promulgate here. I hope soon to get better acquainted with each of you, and will be glad to welcome you to my home. *(Exit.)*

Ezra—There, I thought so. I didn't understand quite all he was talking about, but he said something about reforming us. The nerve of this city guy, comin' to Clinton to stir up things, and his wife turned loose among our women, by gravey, what will happen?

Jeremiah—Ezra, don't get so excited. If we jist pay no attention to his barkin' he'll git tired of Clinton and will soon be gone.

Ezra—But, men, what I am thinkin' is, s'posin' he gits the ear of the Bakers, Glenns, Thompsons and their kinfolks, no telling what'll be to pay. If that crowd gits to reformin' there will be war in this town. Thank goodness, we've got the majority and I own most of the acres 'round here. Now, men, if you don't stick to me and fight that reformin' stuff, it won't be good for you.

Men—(in chorus) We're with you, Ezra.

(Enter Youth distributing circulars.)

Ezra—What's this? *(Reads circular.)* "There will be a meeting at the school house tonight. Important matters of community interest to be discussed. Everybody invited to attend." I'll be jiggered if somebody ain't nervy to order a meetin' without consultin' me. I'll wager it is some of that young furriner's doin's. You fellows hustle around and get all our men there, and we'll show that the majority of Clinton is agin this reformin' business.

CURTAIN

ACT II.

(Stage should be arranged as a school room. When curtain rises the seats on right are occupied by males and females in sympathy with Luther Evington. On the left is Ezra Bartee and his followers. The latter group is made up of males only. They are less in number than males on right. Luther and wife are seated back of stand, or table, facing audience. The seats might be arranged at an angle so the audience may get a fair view of the faces of the auditors. The people are chatting when Ezra enters. He looks over the people and says:)

Ezra—Ugh! A petticoat meeting.

(Luther raps table.)

Luther—The meeting is now called to order.

Ezra—(jumping to feet) May I ask who took it on himself to get up this meetin'?

Luther—We will proceed.

Ezra—(on his feet again, interrupting) I will let you all go on with the proceedin's, but I will say now, I've got enough men here to vote down anything that conflicts with the ways of Clinton.

Chorus of voices on Ezra's side of the house—We're with you, Ezra.

Luther—This meeting is called to consider some very important matters relative to this community. We will be glad to hear from Thomas Allman.

Thomas Allman—Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: Today is the day of progress. We are living at a time when everyone is called upon to use his influence in bettering conditions of his fellow-men. The responsibility we bear to the community is such that calls upon each individual to do his best. If reforms and improvements are needed, make them without delay. *(Ezra and colleagues squirming.)* If the school building is not adequate, build one suitable to the needs, secure the best teachers possible and give our children what is due them —a good education. *(Applause.)* If the roads are impassable in winter, see that they are improved. *(Applause.)* Make the homes attractive by labor-saving devices. Employ farm and home demonstration agents, and have the boys and girls join the agricultural clubs to teach the youngsters how to do better things in better ways than they have been used to. Maybe they can teach us older folks something worth while. *(Applause.)* These are some of the things we can do towards making our community the best on the map. *(Much applause, while Ezra's crowd seems much perturbed.)*

Ezra—(jumping to feet) I would like to say something to you all. I knew this meetin' would cause trouble. Sich throwin' off on Clinton I never seen before. Talkin' about a schoolhouse, I was eddicated in this one. Hit's good enough for anybody. Why, I tore up a plum good skirt of my wife's to chink up the cracks 'cause the cool air gave the children cricks in their necks. Yes, I take pride in this school house. I'm agin buildin' a new-fangled school house. *(Turning to his colleagues, by motions with his hands, tries to induce them to applause. The response is feeble.* These roads I have trod from my youth and I think them good enough for my children. If those new-fashioned roads is made the ortermobiles will pester the life out of Clinton with their honking. They will scare *(rising voice)* our cows milkless, they will frighten our chickens eggless, they will run over our children. *(Again motions for applause.)* Now, the worst thing comes when he wants to waste our good money on those demonstration men and wimen. As owner of these acres 'round about here, I don't need no sich advice, and Clinton don't want it nuther. *(Looks for applause.)* I tell you, men and wimen, I'm agin it, I'm agin it. I move to adjourn.

Voice on his side—I second it.

Ezra—All in favor of it, say "I."

All on Ezra's side—I.

Ezra—All agin it say "No."

Luther's Side—No. *(All voting, including females.)*

Luther—The "No's" have it.

Ezra—The wimen's votes don't count.

Luther—I'm holding this meeting; the women's vote *does* count.

Ezra—Ugh! The first thing you know, the wimen will be votin' in the election for janitor of the jail, an' President of the United States.

Luther—Before adjourning I have a few remarks to make. It is to be regretted that our community is divided on the issues before us. Shall we throw off the boun-

ties of civilization and return to heathenism? We must move one way or the other. We cannot stand still. Those opposing progress are laying a curse upon their children. *(One by one Ezra's followers sneak out while Luther is speaking. This effect can be made very good by practice. Ezra, seated on front seat with head hung down, occasionally shakes it in disapproval. He is not aware that his followers are leaving.)* It means that by opposing progress, our children will grow disgusted with what should be heaven on earth. Ignorance breeds crime, and it will be a sad commentary on Clinton to find it a curse rather than a blessing to our country. We *will* break the shackles, we *will* advance, and crush forever those opposing forces against things that are good. *(Prolonged applause)*

Ezra—(raises head, glances around and finds his side deserted, hastily fumbling for his hat, he shouts:) You'll be sorry for this. *(Darts out.)*

(The company stands and sings a verse of a selected song.)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

(A company of women, dressed in country style, are engaged in a sewing party. When curtain rises, one of the party, Matilda Wharton, is speaking.)

Matilda—Here it is, two years have passed, and Clinton is still in a stew 'cause the furriner, Luther Evington, an' his wife keeps on wranglint to put up a new school 'ouse an' to fix the roads so his ortermobile can run along without gittin' muddy. He did manage to git that county agent and the woman agent in the county, but Ezra Bartee with his money worked both of 'em out when their year was up.

(Enter Susie Clifton, with paper and pencil in hand)

Susie—Here, folks, I want you to sign this paper right now. It was drawed up by Ezra. He is goin' to take it to court tomorrer and prove to the judge that the

biggest majority of Clinton folks don't want no bond issue to put up what Luther Evington calls a high class school 'ouse here.

Hennie Goodlake—(with squeaking voice) Wonder how high Luther wants to build it. I think this school 'ouse is high enough.

Susie—Hurry up and sign it. Ezra says he can take the names and git a conjunction from the court agin it.

Dorothy Rupert—I guess you mean injunction.

Susie—I knew it was some sort of junction. Here's the pencil; write down your names. *(Each in turn writes her name on the paper. In the process, they make a bungling scene. One drops the paper, another the pencil, and has to crawl under a table to get it, etc.)*

Susie—Well, so long, folks, I must be goin' to git the rest of Clinton to put their names on it. *(Exit.)*

Matilda—Ezra seems deader set ag'in the doin' of Luther an' his wife and his bunch than ever.

Dorothy—He never has forgiven the bringin' in of that county agent nigh on to two years ago.

Hennie—I hain't lived hereabouts long. What was the matter with the agent?

Dorothy—You see, Luther and his wife and some folks he got over, unbeknowing to Ezra, had the county spend a thousand dollars to help pay the wages of a man and woman to prattle 'round tellin' us about farmin' and stoppin' babies from cryin'. Well, they come to the scul house and talked to the children 'bout joinin' a corn club and cannin' club. Well, Ezra's son, Nicodemus, set taking it all in. He was a mighty pirt boy. He spent a heap of time studyin' his books and a testament his aunt gave him that he always kept in his pocket. He always had a high notion, he did. He went home that night and asked his pa to let him join the corn club. Ezra, he got furious and set down his foot forever on sich notions. Well, hit broke Nicodemus's heart, and he never was the same afterwards. One day he was missin' from home, and from

that day to this no inklin' of him could be found. Ezra always had a hardness ag'in these reformin' notions, but since Nicodemus left, has declared he would bust up every new-fangled notion that Luther might make.

Matilda—I don' believe so much in these doin's, but I think Ezra is goin' too fur. But it won't do no good to argue ag'in him.

Enter Effie Brown.)

Effie—Have you all heard that Luther Evington has called a meeting for tomorrow night? He arranged it when he heard Ezra would be away at court. I went and told Ezra, and he said he didn't care, because he is sure he will stop the school business. It's a secret, but Ezra says he is going to bust in on the meeting when he gets back, and have his fun. Ezra wants all the folks against these reformin' notions to be there and see him get their goat, as he calls it.

Company—(in chorus) We'll be there, Effie.

Effie—Be sure to get all the men folks to the meetin'.

Matilda—Let's quit the sewing party, and go out and work up a houseful, because the more the merrier.

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

(Court room scene. The meeting room can be transformed into the court room by placing a box on table to constitute the judge's stand, a railing made of light strips can be put quickly into place. When curtain is raised, the judge is in place and court officials in their positions. A number of spectators are seated in court room. Ezra Bartee enters with paper in hand, takes a seat with others. He is not in position to be readily seen by the prisoner.)

Judge—Prisoner to the bar. *(A young man, roughly clad, is placed on witness stand.)*

Policeman—This young man has been picked up as a vagrant and suspicious character.

Attorney—What's your name?

Prisoner—Silas Hartman.

Policeman—I believe that name is assumed. In searching him I found this book—a testament—bearing the name, Nicodemus Bartee.

(Ezra leans forward, grasping seat in front of him.)

Attorney—Come, now, tell me which is your right name.

Prisoner—Nicodemus Bartee is my name. *(Puts handkerchief to his eyes.)*

Judge—I believe this is one of those unfortunate young men who has drifted from home, as many young men do. Nicodemus, have you any statement you would like to make?

Nicodemus—Yes, sir. I will tell the truth about myself. I lived in a wealthy home in Clinton. I've always had an ambition to make something of my life. I studied nature; I studied every book I could get, and the world began looking interesting to me. But my father was violently opposed to all progressive movements. The breaking point came when I made the simple request that I might join the boys' agricultural club just organized by a county agent. Probably I did wrong, but on being refused this, and seeing father working against all reforms, I saw nothing in life to look forward to. I left home, joined the circus, and got kicked out, and here I am a "bum." *(Buries head in hands.)*

(Ezra leaps to his feet, rushes pell mell toward the prisoner. An officer grabs him by the coat, which is jerked off as he rushes forward. He grasps the boy around the neck. Everything is still, except for the sobbing heard. Attorney gently relaxes Ezra's hold and straightens him up. Ezra now somewhat composed, motions that he wishes to speak.)

Ezra—Your Honor, I am the father of this boy. I caused all this trouble. All he said is true. I have been strong ag'in every reformin' notion got up by folks in my section. I have been holdin' back the wheels of progress,

but sir, from this minit, my tracks is changed. I shall not hold back good things from my people, but will use my money and time in building up scul'ouses, churches, roads, an' other things for the good of the people of Clinton. If I have to pay the salary of a county farm agent, an' woman agent too, myself, I will git them to help us along. I have in my hand a petition ag'in a scul'ouse in Clinton. Here it goes. *(Tears it in half, throws on floor, and stamps with foot.)* From now on, you can count on Ezra Bartee to be a friend of the good things for my county. I pray your Honor to turn loose my boy an' the home I will give him will tie him so close to his dad and old home that nothin' can part us any more.

Judge—Mr. Bartee, your son is free. And young man, you have learned your lesson. Go ahead and make yourself a blessing to your home and community.

Ezra—Thanks, your Honor, we must hurry to git to Clinton to a meetin' tonight. I must git there to tell the folks my heart is changed.

CURTAIN.

ACT V.

(Ezra Bartee and son arrive at Clinton late in the evening. They go to the meeling, the son dressed just as he was in court. Just as curtain rises, they walk in and take seats in rear.)

Luther—(rises from seat) Ladies and gentlemen, now that our plans have been perfected for combating opposition, I will entertain a motion to adjourn. *(Ezra jumps to feet to speak. Several voices cry, "down down." He persists.)*

Luther—We have heard enough from you in the past. Our ways are parted. Will someone make a motion to adjourn?

(Ezra rushes forward to speaker's stand. Luther instinctively steps aside. Ezra's followers loudly applaud, while hisses and derision flow from Luther's side.)

Ezra—(looking at Luther's side of the house.) Listen! I am your friend tonight. Let me tell you 'bout it. *(Silence reigns.)* Ladies and gentlemen, I went from here for a dirty mission. I come back your friend. I see the wrong I have been doing you folks. I am sorry for all the harm I have done the neighborhood and 'specially for the hard thoughts and words ag'in Mr. Evington and the balance of you folks who have been tryin' to help to make our place a better place to live in. It is hard to change a man's bringin' up, but I tell you folks when I found my boy, Nicodemus, and there he is, settin' near the door *(pointing at Nicodemus)* down in the hole, 'cause of my hard-headedness; and seein' him tried before the jedge, I went to see ag'in the scul'ouse, I got all busted up. I see my wrong, folks, and ast you to forgive me. Here, folks, is the price *(handing Luther a roll)* of the finest scul'ouse in the county. I will do all I kin to get county agents and everything needed for makin' our county a better place to live in. Clinton will be the best place in the world.

Hennie Goodlake—(loud squeaking voice) Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!

(Prolonged applause, hand-shaking, etc, as curtain falls.)

CURTAIN

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